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CHARLES CROS

# THE RIVER

*EAUX-FORTES D'EDOUARD MANET*

Translated into English by  
J.J. Loe

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LIBRAIRIE DE L'EAU-FORTE

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№ 24.

*P. Manet*

*Charles Cros*



## THE RIVER



Delighted clear memories of the water which is  
Earth, I have designed this song of the River.

Behind the horizon without end, most far, farther,  
the mountains, their peaks as no witness  
saw, condense the water the wind sends.



Where the glacier endlessly accrues, but which mills  
 the base and bottom by gnawing the hard rock.  
 Below, not far from the green fir trees, pure laughter  
 springs low amongst iridescent moss  
 and on the sand of waste rocks.  
 The ravine there spells another current,  
 a thousand more. Until a torrent grows  
 which descends to the plain and begins the River.

But the shallow water is too sharp and its zeal too new  
 to fertilize the soil. On these jagged permimeters,  
 hawthorn, lavender and thyme, golden brooms  
 find shelter only in the cracks of stones.  
 Here the torrent breaks down barriers,  
 sand and rocks themselves are dragged.  
 It is a plain. It strays in detours  
 which calms its fury. And a few small trees  
 follow the sounds of water on sandstone and marbles.  
 These hills are the last stirrings of giant mountains,  
 streams of frozen oceans, flowing granite  
 hillsides, now turn green in mottled spots.  
 White and reds stir about more like cattle  
 or small livestock. Their ringing  
 bells mingle with the dull murmuring  
 Water.

Banks of sharp poplars love the plain.  
 Already their passive lines escort,  
 here and there the calm and strong River.

The fields are owned by the powerful. At the banks,  
 those who have not the hope of the harvest-going mob



expect the unexpected, running water brings  
 flakes of gold, sapphires, diamonds and rubies;  
 those rocks, after so many suffering storms,  
 drop from the bottom of their mined mass,  
 under the caressing cold influx, stubbornly.  
 The sand washed, like promised dreams,  
 for a bit of gold, finally, at the bottom of the sieve!  
 "Take your stick, digger! The city is far away,  
 squinty eyes peek inside your bag."

Others work hard casting large lead  
 sinkered nets; wiggling silver fish  
 swell these grey wefts, producing smells fresh  
 and bland clinging to their fishing gear.



But the gain is precarious, and more than one rascal  
falls, a swollen corpse, into the beguiling flow.

The River carries everything elsewhere. With his axe  
the lumberjack grooms the mountains, fells  
high fir trees, which he entrusts to the current,  
below, the industrious sawmill takes  
these trees, and, as an accomplice to the River  
dismembers them, in spite of their sound revolt.

Then the plain with its harvest, then the hamlets  
at which animals drink from the banks:  
Oxen, horses. While upstream washerwomen  
slam their beaters on linen and stones.  
Or plunge their pearly arms in the running water,  
and showing their bare feet, their little petticoats,  
sing a song about a King's marriage.  
Song, bare feet, and white arms, distract  
the shirted lads who let their tired horse go,  
its chest steaming in the water, by the curves of the Ford.

The foliage, covers an entire island  
like we'd wish for in a quiet dream.

Next are hills of erratic steps,  
small woods; closer to the water, poplars  
and willow. The River now expanded, slows,

fills with water lily and rushes. Flowing golden  
in the evening, the flies dance.



But up close,  
the slopes now rise. Rocks  
often interrupt the cultured slopes.  
Across the stony country, where the River meanders,  
nourishes, poor and mossy, brambles and vermin.  
The current gets strangled in ravines, leaping  
upon the rocks, or sleeps in the holes it digs.

But the water will not stop its adventurous course  
despite both works and sleep. Here are  
the breaches open upon an horizon obscured



by the dusty water. Its flat stone bed  
sharply ends, and the flow, heavily planed, breaks out  
in an endless roar. At the bottom,  
the rocks scatter like the after-fight  
of titans, and break the water on their hard edges.  
In the distance, everything is wet. Audacious green  
chests box-in and exhaust the fragmented brightness  
of the foamy falls.

Here the flat country  
again extends its surroundings, its harvest. Rivers,  
From you know where, capricious and proud  
run the fields, believing that they will always live  
adorned in their youthful flowers.  
But the victorious River stops them at the crossing,  
and silences the laughter in its broad, wise course.  
The shores and hamlets move as one.

Here is the discordant industry of time.  
The nightingales, upset by noise and sooty  
plants, leave the fresh-faced woods,  
the rain and the morning scented Lily of the Valley.  
The sun always shines, and man always watches.  
This is what he has made: wharves and locks;  
the willow trees, wary of these tricks,  
and the, up to now, proud poplars.  
The hillsides and where the wolf runs, are ruined,  
populated now with white homes and factories  
with methodically painted brick smokestacks.

The quiet river, enlivens the plain.  
Young men, strong and beautiful, tame the water,  
and forget, through their rowing, their slavish plot  
and go, happy, with women.

Here is the city,  
The mammoth city with all its hospitable crisis,

The water flows only between their proper docks.  
All leading to the cataracting depths of suicide.  
A mossy face ringed grossly with oxide,  
drowning in untenable hope.

Lined capricious and black over the green  
night, houses, storied palaces  
all spangled. At the port, sales are brokered  
and finished. The day wanes and bats  
flit heavily, elicit tiny cries.  
Old unused quays of disjointed stone  
support drab houses with pointy roofs.  
Poor women with skinny arms wash their rags.



Deep waves, pile-up upon some great bridge  
curt yet fierce, and its passive stones  
let themselves crumble tranquilly into the water.



We see less of the stars in the sky  
with the lights of the docks and the streets  
so full of noise and boisterous voices  
from cars.

Only, the River does not laugh  
under the fat and heavy barges. In addition, in the depths  
sewers vomiting black water, horrendous scum,  
rank upon rank, tousled with the flotsam, the sons  
of distant peaks.  
The dogs, the cats who spoil the current,  
effectively staining the great river  
with the moon, a silver eye, speckle the surface.  
But, no matter the human life the water channels,  
the filth, the immense crowds and gay balls?  
Water, not these backwardness of things.

The guests  
are broken now, downstream of the city.  
Man has dredged-up the river bed, made it docile  
now that it is so broad and so deep.  
The sea,  
by tarred vessels is left with a bitter fragrance,  
telling of far-away lands, wherever the wind blows.  
The River, beloved of human industry,  
continues through the campaign. At night  
it advances triumphant, constellated with noise  
leaving empearled with fresh air and dew.

Then, in the morning, beyond the cries of the city  
there composes upon the plain, beaded upon velvet  
jewel-green, slopes forged in their folds:  
farms with large roofs, low and moss-covered,  
tapestries of endless meadows where magpies flit about.  
Richness softly spoken which only some thoughtful peasant  
can assess when whipping his old and winded mule.

The River will always widen, as long as the banks  
lose their fugitive lines towards the horizon.

The abased hillsides, the restless sky, the air  
bubbling and salty, proclaims that the sea  
is a relentless, crazy escapade of water,  
which once fell from the hot and bursting sky.



The sea demands all caprice, and then, sometimes  
it refuses the tributes of the River, the silt, the wood,  
the corpses, the broken rocks of distant mountains,  
from the fat lands, the hamlets, the vast plains.  
It stole that to feed the sea.



And everything is piled up, an obstacle to the River.  
The proud man here is the distinct debris of every year,  
the dark times where his race was not born.

The land rejoices. From afar the cock's call  
cracks the haze. Amongst the pools and docks,  
and moored boats, the cries of the capstans rise,  
where a thousand porters are unloading food,  
bales and barrels, metal bars and wheat;  
all that you might find in faraway fruit shops.  
In the smoky cabarets, sailors congregate  
to menace in exotic languages.

The water of the River stops, a bit troubled, before  
getting lost, in the unspeakable, shifting infinity.

It's like a battle in regular line:  
squadrons galloping, raising dust,  
the waves of the sea arrive to great noises,  
white with foam, victorious airs, and then  
return again; the River repelling with effort  
the small, bold flows of fresh water.  
The sea flees, but carries and disperses forever,  
rank by rank, all these flows, the sons of distant summits.

Haughty Muse. Clear-eyed Muse, be blessed!  
Despite your long disdaining, my song is over;  
because you have consoled me with all your mocking sounds,  
you have shown me one of my greatest memories,  
glimmers to tint the water, runs and babbles



of fresh water where, in the evening, the swallow is anchored.  
For I followed its flow to the mighty sea.

So it reads, my friends, this song, quiet and proud,  
in times of fever and in days of challenge  
it lulls ones heart with the murmur of the River.





MEAUVE. — IMP. A. COCHET.



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